

POINT OF VIEW

STATINTL

CIA Comes in From the Cold

By MARY McGRORY

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Everybody likes the Central Intelligence Agency a little better now.

People who thought it should never exist and hate what they think it is doing look at it today with something like open affection.

Chairman J. William Fulbright of the Foreign Relations Committee, its severest critic, is awash in clandestine gratitude and mirth. Whatever it did at the Bay of Pigs, the CIA has done a lot for him.

Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy, D-Minn., who recently and in vain tried to bring it to heel, is all secret smiles at having caught its master spy writing in all-too-visible ink.

No Public Thanks

Nobody can thank CIA director Richard M. Helms publicly for what he did, which was to provide the city with some desperately needed comic relief. So for the record, everybody has to regard the perfect little calamity which delivered him to his enemies on Capitol Hill as a frightful lapse in ethics, deportment and security.

Actually, the Helms letter to the editor of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat in praise of an editorial that was entitled "Brickbats for Fulbright" and called the senator "crafty" has reassured a hot and tired city. There will always be a bureaucrat to make life worth living.

Connoisseurs of the rather meager literature of catastrophic letters have decided the Helms entry ranks with Ezra Taft Benson's celebrated mishap of 10 years ago. Over the signature of the Secretary of Agriculture went a letter saying "It is excellent" of an article in Harper's Magazine which referred to the farmers



RICHARD M. HELMS

of America as "pampered tyrants."

Cries for Benson's resignation ran through the Senate until it was discovered the missive was the work of a sub-secretary who was merely carrying out a department directive to reply to all critical communications "as politely as possible."

Neither Wrote Nor Read

What gives the Helms' epistolary disaster its special flavor is that while he did not write it — or even, he admitted in a special senatorial session called to savor the affair, read it — it sounds as though he had written it himself.

It had the ring of sincere expression, as a good letter should. It was, in fact, rather admirable in its terseness and cordiality and shows that the silent service, whatever its failures, is making progress against federal prose.

But senators, who employ scribes themselves, are blind to the style at such moments. They found the letter "offensive" and, in regard to Fulbright, "inaccurate." They

professed themselves, with straight faces, to be "shocked" and "disappointed." Men who may privately agree with both the editorial-writer and the letter-writer rushed to the defense of their beleaguered colleague. Fulbright's foes on the Armed Services Committee, who had fought what one had called his attempt "to muscle in" on the surveillance of the CIA, praised his patriotism, his intellect and his heart.

This was, of course, not what Helms' still anonymous scribe had in mind. He was responding to a new directive in the CIA, which is to make the agency seem more lovable, less secretive.

Like Anybody Else

The CIA, like other agencies and other men, wishes to participate openly in the life of its times. Its response to harsh criticism has been an attempt to prove that it is really like anybody else, not exactly, mind you, but more than most people think.

Maybe 007 would have liked to join the local men's club and be a member of the bowling team. Such an impulse is obviously stirring in the shrouded CIA. When other people see editorials crowing over the defeat of their enemies, they rush to the writing table and dash off a spirited "well done." "Why can't we?" the CIA asked itself.

Well, it has its answer now as a result of its monitored correspondence. Nobody has a clearer idea of what it is actually doing; but at least people know what it is trying to do. The fact that it can commit a boner right out in the open just like anybody else has brought it a lot closer to a lot of people.

CPYRGHT